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ON PAGE A-4

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U.S. Said to Act to Prevent Attack by Iraq From Oman

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WASHINGTON, Oct. 3 — Alarmed by intelligence reports that Iraq was planning to launch air and helicopter strikes against Iran from nearby Oman last weekend, the United States and Britain exerted considerable diplomatic pressure to prevent the widening of the conflict, diplomatic sources said today.

They said information was received on Saturday from Oman that Iraq had sent troop-carrying helicopters and planes to that small Persian Gulf nation and was considering asking the Omanis for permission to attack three Iranian-held islands in the Gulf and Iranian installations near the Strait of Hormuz.

Such attacks might have resulted in Iranian retaliation against Oman and such oil-producing Gulf states as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait and in the closing of the strait to oil shipping. But the attacks did not take place.

This was disclosed to reporters here and in London as President Mohammad Zia ul-Haq of Pakistan arrived in Washington for a meeting with President Carter this morning to discuss Pakistan's economic problems and General Zia's frustrated efforts on behalf of the Islamic Conference to end the Iran-Iraq war.

An Answer to Iranian Charge

Politically, it is being suggested that the strong stand taken by the Carter Administration against the use of Oman's territory may have averted a dangerous spread of the fighting. But it is also acknowledged that there is no certainty about what might have happened.

High-ranking officials here hint at another aspect of the situation. Iran, from the start of the war with Iraq, has accused the United States of collusion with the Iraqis. In effect, the Americans are saying in response that not only are such charges false but that in fact the United States is working to protect Iran's integrity.

At a news conference in New York yesterday Secretary of State Edmund S. Muskie said: "There is absolutely no substance to any accusation that we were involved in collusion with Iraq in connection with this current fighting. There never has been any basis for it; and as a matter of fact, there is a lot of basis for the opposite conclusion."

The Oman crisis, as it is being described here, occurred as the Carter Administration was occupied with an urgent request from Saudi Arabia for air-defense assistance.

Early in the Iran-Iraq conflict, Saudi Arabia and some other Arab states agreed to permit some Iraqi planes to land on their territory. The Saudis feared that Iran might retaliate by attacking its eastern oilfields.

Neutrality Was Prime Concern

The overriding American concern in deciding whether to provide the four electronic-surveillance planes, known as Awacs, for Airborne Warning and Control Systems, was that the move not be seen as undermining American neutrality in the conflict.

It is presumed here that Saudi Arabia

asked Iraq to remove the planes that had landed on its territory so that it would be easier for the United States to go ahead with the Awacs decision. President Carter provisionally approved sending one of the four planes on Sunday, reporters were told, and the final decision was made Monday after Saudi Arabia agreed to issue a statement that it had asked for the planes and after members of Congress could be briefed.

By coincidence, Lord Carrington, the British Foreign Secretary, was in Washington over the weekend after attending the United Nations General Assembly session in New York. According to diplomatic officials, he was struck by the high degree of tension in the Administration.

Today President Carter told General Zia that the United States would stand by its 1959 commitment to help Pakistan if it was attacked by the Soviet Union, whose troops are in neighboring Afghanistan. General Zia did not ask for military aid but stressed the need for more economic assistance for refugees.